

Clark Elementary, Week 1

December 11, 2007

Clark Elementary School Breakout Room

- The goal of this meeting is to divide and conquer. We feel (audience) that we are being dictated to about this plan.
- We go in schools every day – they can go into these schools every day.
- This is my neighborhood, I don't want to see that close either. We all went to McKinley and Taft- we don't want to see our schools close. I am angry and I don't appreciate that we are separated (in this meeting)
- I want to know how much the lease is at the 825 Building.
- Question: Why aren't the schools in Ward 3 on this paper?
- Student: I want to know why we need to have 8th graders and 6th graders in our school because they will be bringing us down.
- You are merging different neighborhoods together and that is dangerous. I have seen two students fighting just because of their neighborhood differences. It has been happening for generations. You can't put people together and expect they will get along. They have issues aside from schools. (just in general...) You can't put 5th street and 7th street and 9th street students together – it causes problems. It's a generational problem.
- I am here because Ms. Rhee told us that she hopes to reach a decision by January. This is not the way the school system is truly interested. This is a process that was designed to be a six-week process and that is unfair.
- My concern is that this process was based on the parents, teachers, community, etc., with no real input from the community. I don't know if this will change anyone's mind. When you want to get enough process, enrichment, and resources. This is a school that is already thriving. We went out and got a lot of resources. I don't think that administration has respected the efforts that this school has put in place to help our own students. The building has been re-structured and our children have finally settled down because our school is going so well.

- For me, being under enrolled by 20 is not a big deal. If this is a concern, then public school is not taking into effect that these are private and charter schools and they are under enrolled by only 20, that's not a biggie.
- I was just saying that we have a lot of resources that come from our center budget in Clark- and we are doing so well. This might help the schools eliminate or correct what is going on. There is not a lot of time between now and judgment day, which is right around the corner.
- Saint Gabriel's is going to charter. We feel that being under enrolled by 20 is not the end of the world and we are doing what we are supposed to do.

Chancellor Rhee:

1. Thanks for being here. This is a topic that is difficult, not something people feel good about. I appreciate you coming out and expressing your views and for emailing.

One of the things I have found very difficult- parents are saying that we brought in extra resources. Where we are going long-term is to schools that are staffed properly. In Clark, we don't have the staffing we want for every child. For academic support, we would have a literacy and numeracy coach,..wellness support, guidance counselor, social work, etc.

For enrichment, full time art, music, gym. Health, student teacher in every school. This is what I have heard and seen that students need as I've traveled across the city from 5-6 months. Every parent and teacher doesn't have the resources needed.

- How come some can afford a lot and others can't.?

Part of our plan is that we believe every child should have that level of staffing, as I have heard from teachers and principals.

- Teacher: schools are self-sufficient, our school is not dependent on the city. We have obtained a self-sufficiency that others haven't.
- Para: I am listening to what you're saying Ms. Rhee. You are talking about enrollment and academics, but I haven't seen you in Clark. We want to see you there...We are here, the staff, working really hard to change Clark. In your mind, Clark is not your standard, but we're out doing the work. We know that some schools don't have certain things because they're not fighting for it. If the PTA wants certain things, we have to find it. We are all together,. I am upset because, until you come to Clark and sit in the room, then you can say that Clark isn't on that standard.

Chancellor Rhee: I agree that we're heading in the right direction, but in terms of "Clark is not there yet..." We know that we're getting there, but we want to get there. The comment that you made before...about fighting. There are many communities where the children don't have the adults, where the parents aren't fighting for it. That doesn't mean that, when the parents do have that, there shouldn't be more. If we could provide teachers at all schools, the additional materials could be over and above. We could be adding to more than the baseline.

- I'm a 3rd grade teacher for DCPS. I hear a lot of HQ teachers and the blueprint. A lot of what we deal with is on issues outside of the classroom. The average child from these homes isn't reading when they come from home. I think what we really need to talk about is gentrification in these neighborhoods. Their income doesn't allow them to afford housing. What are we looking at? Are we displacing these children in the long-term bigger picture? Everyone has their individual needs, but most are struggling with social issues and no social workers, parents aren't receiving the services they need, and really giving them. Am I going to read about DCPS in the history books? I know sometimes decisions are made re: protocol, etc, but I think you need to have more dialogues that are rich. We have to bring parents in, etc.

Chancellor Rhee: Yes, we need to address these issues, and the comprehensive staffing model will help—psychologists and support. We don't have someone who is giving out students what they need. So, what we are referring to is that kids are coming and have a whole host of needs and we want the comprehensive staffing model to address those needs.

Once we make the final decisions, we will work with community members to find out what we think will really add – any number of things that would help create a comprehensive model.

- Don't you think input from us? Shouldn't we have been at the table?

Michelle Rhee: One thing people have said, before you announce anything, you should bring people in. We had to identify the schools we were talking about, potentially consolidating, so those communities would know that they should have an impact. As opposed to big, citywide discussions that may/may not impact people. We have to put a proposal forward then people would know if they could be impacted.

Bottom line – we still won't make this decision until the end of January – there are a number of things to happen. I want every parent to know by open enrollment process what their options are. To go in without knowing is unfair.

For teachers who want to know where they should go – they have to have the information. What this and others – over the course of the summer, they make decisions in the summer I know people say this is quick, but this timeline is most respectful of parents and teachers.

- Teacher: A lot of parents across the city are saying that they are leaving. They are going to leave DC Public schools – they are fed—up with on/off. If their children have to go across busy streets, they're leaving. You are going to lose a lot of students. We don't want to be a part of on-today, off-tomorrow.

Michelle Rhee: I think that's completely fair and I appreciate that. I have heard that they are so excited that instead of charter, they are going to stay. Until we can stabilize, until we have the initiatives that any parent would find compelling, that's our endgame. Are some parents going to make that decision? In my mind, unless we have a huge intervention right now to start new programs, get net staffing, etc. Unless we curb the trend, we won't be in a place until we reopen something.

- Do you think Pre-K-8 will bring them back?

I don't think people aren't going to bring their children back. The second thing is – I just talked to a parent that said the Pre-k-8 is the best thing. She doesn't feel like there are compelling middle school options. If I have to leave for a middle school, she would leave. That doesn't mean it's for all communities. Some want the 6-8 model.

- What communities are we talking about ?

The next round will talk about programming...

- My question is: Are children being denied access and being put in imminent danger when they are being moved from their schools to other schools without transportation?

Michelle Rhee: In some cases, transportation isn't a problem. Young ES, etc., is no problem. In some cases, receiving is a little further away. That's why we wanted to have the other last conversation.

- Has there been an inventory of the children who actually live in the community?

DCPS: We can show you, within a specific area, how many school-aged children by ward, in the zone, and which schools they go through.

- How many DCPS students live in Ward 3? One thing that did not seem to be considered is that we have a lot of DCPS students who are out-of-boundary. My question is – did anyone talk about going to the communities where the students

may be from. We need a school where students can go from one place to another. When they have to go from one community to another is that it creates a problem with self-esteem.

We should be able to spell out, not only that, I have a grandchild in Montgomery County, she walks to school. Because she has to cross a major street. About 4 weeks ago, I watched a kid get hit here in the street, trying to cross the street. Are we going to deny these kids access to public education because their parents cannot afford transportation?

DCPS (summary): ...No, but some areas will be more impacted than others.

- I think her reason for asking about W3 is that it isn't being targeted for closing. The income is middle- to higher income. When you talk about communities, you talk about their income. I live in DuPont Circle and my community is doing well. If you can't make it, you can move to another area. I am not clear on what ultimate population you are speaking of, so when I hear someone take big global ideas, they sound nice on paper what community is being displaced.
- I think DCPS will become archaic. I went to Murch, junior year at Dunbar. I was a DCPS student. Dunbar was highly-performing high school. I've been on both sides. I am looking from different perspectives. What's not making sense to me is what kind of community are we trying to create. Sometimes people get excited on sound bytes. You might hear "K-8" this sounds great.
- As an educator, being with 8th graders, who are very different from when I grew up. Clark does not have the resource teachers yet, but my question is: If Clark did well without those resources, why are you merging Clark into a school that has not done well with other resources. These people are performing well, because to me – the number one thing should be academic performance. We cannot educate a bunch of misguided children off of sound bytes. When I don't hear the data, I wonder what we are really looking at – right or wrong?
- Criteria: What schools most likely based on criteria? We are on a one-way street. Truesdell, where they are sending on our children doesn't have enough space. They want to put some of Clark students have no playground. It is also open-space a lot of children cannot learn in an open-space school.
- Student: Why would you want to close our school when other kids have bad schools and I know I'm getting a good education at Clark ES?
- Why is Clark on the list of proposed schools?

1. Enrollment 2002-2006 decline was greater than the median. The middle decline was 21%, Clark was at 29%

2. Total enrollment less than DCPS median (272 – Clark 224)- below the middle point for all elementary schools

- Walk through the schools. I know some schools are less than 200!

DCPS re-explains “median concept, and:

Took those 40 schools (33 ES and 7 MS) – looked at Geographic isolation – far away?

Student growth projections: younger/older

school enrollment patterns

gym/playground

safety and walk ability for other schools. No highway or train tracks, etc.

- Growth potential of DCPS. We don't want to make our schools exactly the same size. – we want to leave
- You guys aren't going to pull any students from charter this way. I think this city has more charter schools than all of Virginia.
- Why so many kids are going to charter schools. People don't want to be in a minority...I graduated from this school system, got an excellent education. The schools are not performing either.
- The chancellor paints a good picture. In reality, we are privatizing DC Public Schools. I understands the need to have a beautiful schools, beautiful communities. The danger of putting other students in...I'm not hearing about the students. I am hearing about everything except what the student needs.

So many students in DC can't have librarian, asst. principal, etc., because they don't have the number of children and the money to provide for them. One of the major reasons is to get the numbers up to a level that you can then afford.

At Sousa, we couldn't have a music teacher, due to declining enrollment. One of the biggest reasons is to ensure we have a full program at every school. I truly believe and seeing what goes on, it is about making sure there is a full, complete program.

- We work with the students – we know the answer. I am listening to you and I do disagree because you have to look at the different things that we want. It sounds like we are trying to privatize DC public schools. If they have a problem outside of a school, they bring it into school.

It's not just art and music, but social workers, psychologists, and listening. We want to address all of those needs.

- If you all leave 825, we could keep our little school. We go to schools every day, why can't you do that? They are saving \$24 million from closing – move out of 825 and we can keep our little schools.
- I'm a parent and I am really (5x) upset about this whole thing. I am upset because:
- Clark Elementary is working for my child. I look at Clark parallel to a person that I building upon their schools, their education, compelling them into the next level.
- If I am working to become a doctor, started a medical program, etc., and a I go further. If Clark is working. ..why are you all so gung-ho on destroying it?
- The things that Clark has achieved haven't come from DCPS. These are outside resources, this is the community. The community is generally concerned about what's happening at Clark. I have, within, the last three years can sincerely say that the teachers are committed, sincere, and they embrace the children. Why aren't you watering the flower? Why aren't you nurturing the seed? Why are you destroying it? It makes no sense. (It's a conspiracy!)
- How much is being spent/saved on this revitalization?
- What is going to be the average class size as a result of the reorganization?
- What other options have been thoroughly explored other than downsizing?
- Why does all of this have to happen tomorrow?
- Which one to address? All of them. We aren't here to answer every question/concern?
- We discussed the criteria for the proposed listing? How much money is being spent for all of this?

Next meeting – next round of discussion – programmatic impacts – continue the conversation, getting initial questions answered. In each conversation, a lot of this is listing – writing down concerns, and hearing what you have to say.

The process has to be presented so the next round of conversations is around the programming...what schools/what will the program be?

It may not get answered today...what is the budget, how is this going to look?

The class size is 24 that we are shooting for after closures. We went through a lot of different criteria to come up with the fairest programs to get this done. Also, this didn't start yesterday – it's been going for years. This is not new as of last month. On page 2, you see some of the timeline over the past couple of years. The difference between this and the previous, was to do this now so that the impact for children could be felt now.

- Parent: My thing is – if you do something (quickly), how are you going to fine-tune your operation after you destroyed something that's working.

The goal here is to get this done fairly quickly, but you want the benefits to be available to children. If we did it slowly, the results would be slow.

- Parent: 6 months to 15 years is no comparison. What I am saying to you – you are not even giving us a reasonable amount of time to even digest this. The mere fact that this is being dropped in our laps mid-stream in the midst of a holiday. It's either calculated or we just don't care. If everyone is saying they understand it...why is it happening this way.

The administration wants to fix things now. We have people come and go who say they are going to do fix this. But this administration is serious about fixing things so children can get what they need today, not in the system. I understand you don't think this is a fix. Make changes now so next year we can help more kids

The timeline feels compressed. What the chancellor spoke to – the OOB process occurs in Jan/Feb. If we don't tell parents until March, they don't have a chance to decide where they want their child to go. We want people to have a range of options so they can make choices and have information on what they need to do...We want to tweak and respond.

- The model they want to do is like what's at the learning center Prek-9. I live in the neighborhood that I teach in. It's not that I'm living a separate life. My daughter went to Takoma. That model, they will have children climbing over each other. In 7th grade, 38 children in her class. It was about 90+ children per grade. In 8th grade, 39 children in her class. So, this model they are proposing about technology, half of the computers are broken. Now, I have a niece over there, when you proposed that, many teachers not trained. A lot of students don't have the benefits. Rush children into a program no one is trained for. Are you going to do this in a longer timeframe? The train is going to crash..a big crash.

- DC PS had a strong school base. I don't see the old-school people still here. A lot of old-folks. Fenty doesn't make me comfortable, he makes me nervous. I am still trying to see if you meet my standards. He's still on probation to me. His own interests, his kids are not in DC Public schools, they are in a private school. How do you do that when your own children aren't in public school.
- What is Chancellor Rhee's exit when she decides to leave? What happens when the plan changes drastically? What is the real problem? We move so quickly. Sometimes it's best to sit still, slow down, and listen. We want to move quickly and not listen. Let's get some old data.
- I can personally say that Chancellor Rhee has been at Clark. I know no one from 825 has ever stepped foot into my classroom. If I was on this committee...why is it we don't have a team of people who come over and say something about serious questions/concerns that she's looking for? Even if she would come back, I would like to see data from her visit to Clark ES. I need to see something that would make me say more than what she was heard. It doesn't make logical sense...in my mind, some of these pieces do not add up to me. I want data from my school, not from Milwaukee.
- I want to know if she really visited Clark and what she actually wanted to observe.

I get your point that sometimes you have to wait and watch, but there is a feeling that we do a lot of waiting and watching. I understand your concerns about changes at the top – they come and they go. They are not allowed to stay.

She's got the support of the mayor – which is different. There are some real things that are different this time. I've known Chancellor Rhee for a couple of years and she's deeply committed to this. It's going to take time for people to trust and have faith. She's trying...you get in trouble if you wait and you get in trouble if you don't.

Her thought is to fix things as fast as we can – tomorrow isn't soon enough for our children.

- My quick statement, I've been working with staff since I came on board this summer. And, I guess what's frustrating to me. I love the comprehensive staffing model. I believe that this is ultimately a reality...I'm glad to see that the receiving schools. We feel that it seems dumb that Clark is above many of the receiving schools. There is something to be said for everyone on staff, save three people show up to an overnight retreat with no pay. We've got the social support of the building, the resources, everything is really growing in the right direction. Why not

build on a staff that is moving so high...It seems dumb to break us down and then build again.

- Students wouldn't receive less.
- Please note: Clark is energy efficient (claim is in dispute). The other buildings are 30 or 40 years older than our buildings.
- The schools that are under enrolled are dragging the system down. Even though Clark is under enrolled, but not underachieving.

We have buildings that have 200 students who have space for 600. When you have schools with 100 or 150 student and they can't afford to have a full staff...when they are all out of sync, they pull it down. When you couple them together, we are able to get the full staff.

- How are children supposed to travel to the other schools? How are we going to get to/from the other schools?